

The EXPEDIENCY of a Divine
Revelation Represented.

A

SERMON

PREACH'D before the

Right HONOURABLE

The Lord MAYOR,
ALDERMEN,

And Citizens of LONDON,

AT THE

CATHEDRAL CHURCH of *St. Paul*,
On *Sunday, February 16, 172 $\frac{1}{2}$* .

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Publish'd at the Request of the Lord Mayor.

L O N D O N :

Printed for EDWARD SYMON, in *Cornhill*; and Sold
by S. WILMOTT, Bookseller in *Oxford*, 172 $\frac{1}{2}$.

(Price Sixpence.)

THE EXPEDITION
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TO THE
Right Rev^d. Father in GOD,
WILLIAM,

By DIVINE PROVIDENCE,
Lord Bp. of *DURHAM*;
This DISCOURSE
IS,

With all possible Respect,
DEDICATED

By the Author.

TO THE

Right Rev. Father in GOD

WILLIAM

BY DEDICATED

Lord Bp. of DURHAM

THIS DISCOURSE

IS

WITH AN APPROPRIATE

DEDICATION

TO THE



JOHN VI. 45.

*It is written in the Prophets,
They shall be all taught of God.*

THE Words here cited are a Prediction of that more full and perfect Discovery of God's Will, which should in future Time be made to the World. There are frequent Intimations of this kind scatter'd throughout the Sacred Writings: And the firm Expectations which the *Jews* entertain'd of a *Messiah*, who should teach them all things, is a Point too evident to bear a Dispute, or to need a Proof.

But we are told by *Infidels*, That Provisions of this kind are *unnecessary*: That common Reason is abundantly *sufficient* to instruct us in common Duties: That, as the Supreme Being is perfectly *wise*, so He must always proceed upon the *highest Reason*: And there-

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fore, that an unanswerable Objection may be drawn from hence, against the Truth of a *Revelation*.

This Point deserves to be consider'd : For if a Revelation were *really* unnecessary and useless, a Difficulty would arise indeed. God cannot act *unreasonably* ; nor exercise his Power in an *extraordinary* manner, on Occasions unworthy of an *extraordinary* Interposition.

This must be agreed on all hands : But then it should be remember'd, that we are not always proper Judges of the *Fitness* or *Unfitness* of things. It would therefore become us, rather to *presume* a Fitness in the thing from the *Certainty* of God's Action, than to argue against the *Reality* of God's Action from the *presum'd Unfitness* of the thing.

This Remark might be of some Service in the Point before us : But the Cause we are engag'd in, needs not this Advantage. We may safely advance a step farther ; and instead of defending our selves by alledging, That there may be Reasons for making a Revelation which do not *appear* to us, we may undertake to prove to any sober Person the plain *Expediency* of the thing it self. And if this be once clear'd,

clear'd, the Way to a Revelation lies plain before us: We have nothing to do but to examine the Proofs, and to decide agreeably to the Evidence propos'd.

The Point then to be consider'd, is, *The Expediency of a Divine Revelation.*

This, in the general, is *virtually* acknowledg'd by the greatest and wisest Men of former Ages. Being conscious how little the World could be influenc'd either by Perswasion or Terror, they had Recourse to some *pretended* Declaration of God's Will; and whilst they wanted a *real* Revelation, they forg'd one. It will be needless to enlarge on the *Heathen Oracles*. These are well known, and the Uses to which they were applied.

Practices of this kind must indeed be condemn'd. Nothing can justify, or excuse *Imposture*: What is in it self *wrong*, cannot be *necessary*: and we must patiently bear up under those Difficulties, which we know not how to cure with Innocence. The Purpose therefore for which I have mention'd the Heathen Oracles, is this; To shew how sensible the wisest Men have been, that the World cannot be otherwise influenc'd than by the Belief of a *supernatural* Authority: And consequently,

frequently, that an exprefs Declaration of the Divine Will was, in their Opinions, much *wanted*, and highly *expedient*.

But it will be proper not to rest this Point on the mere Opinions of Men, how Wise or Great soever. We should rather trace it farther, and examine into the Foundation on which such a Doctrine must be built.

Now this I shall do, By considering the present Circumstances of our Nature ; By observing the Insufficiency of *natural Light*, — the Weakness of mere *human* Motives ; and of consequence, the *Inability* which Men lie under of answering the End of their Being, without the Aids of a Divine *Revelation*.

This therefore I affirm to have been *expedient*, as well

To *settle* a proper Rule of Religion and Morality ; as

To *enforce* such a Rule, once known, by suitable Rewards and Punishments.

In order to evince these Points, some Things must be supposed by us ; But they are such withal as our Adversaries must suppose in common, and are as much concern'd to grant, as we to ask. We suppose then, That common Reason will lead us to acknowledge the Being
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of a God; — will give us some Notions of his *Power, Wisdom, Justice, and Goodness*; — will suggest to us the Belief of a *Providence*; — will teach us the *Relation* in which we stand to God as *Creatures*; — our Obligations to *worship* and *obey* him in the general; — the Duties of *Justice, Charity, and Temperance*, in the more obvious Instances; and, lastly, that we *deserve* to suffer, as often as we deviate from the known Rules of Duty. These Points, I say, cannot be disputed by those Persons we have now to deal with; because they maintain such an abundant *Sufficiency* of human Reason, as supercedes the Necessity of any other Instructor.

Upon these Principles therefore we set forth; and observe, That altho' human Reason plainly instructs us in the *general Necessity* of worshipping God, and of obeying his Will; — yet we are still to learn, What that Worship is which will be most *acceptable* to him, and What those Particulars are in which he *expects* our Obedience.

Or, if these things might be *discover'd* by natural Light, (as 'tis evident at first sight they cannot) yet we must be conscious to our selves of having *transgress'd*, on numberless

occasions, the very known Rules of Duty. In these Circumstances we must be sensible how much we *deserve* to suffer ; and consequently, how much our Behaviour must expose us to the *Divine Displeasure*. But do we know on what Terms God will be *reconcil'd* to us ? Can we *atone* for our Sins, or make *Satisfaction* to the injur'd Majesty of God ?

The best we can do, is, for the future to *reform* our Lives. But then, a future Obedience would still have been *due* from us, tho' our past Lives had been *innocent* : and That which would have been but the *Duty* of a *Saint*, can make no Atonement for a *Sinner*.

We know indeed that *Sacrifices* have obtain'd in most Ages, and Parts of the World ; by which Men hop'd to avert God's Anger, and to gain his Favour. But then if we enquire what Grounds they had for these Hopes, we shall lose our selves in the Search. The mere *Reasons* of things will suggest nothing of this kind : And, strictly speaking, The *Sacrifices* which were offer'd up, rather suggested to them the *Death* which they *deserv'd*, than the *Deliverance* which they wanted.

Thus

Divine Revelation represented. 7

Thus far appears the Expediency of a Revelation in order to fix those Points which are purely of a *religious* Nature. — But we must not stop here : The very Rules of *Morality* want to be settled : and our Inability to do this, merely on the Foot of *natural Reason*, will, I hope, appear from the following Considerations.

But when I assert, That we are incapable of fixing a Rule of Morality by natural Light, I desire to be understood with Favour. I do not maintain that 'tis *absolutely* impossible to discover a moral Rule, by the best Improvements of our Reason. This would carry the Point too far ; and run us on Difficulties impossible to be solv'd.

We should distinguish therefore between what is *merely possible*, and what may *reasonably be expected* in the present State of things : — Between those things, which are merely possible to a *few* Persons of extraordinary Genius and Opportunities, and those which are possible to the *Bulk* and *Generality* of Mankind.

Allowing therefore, that the Discovery of a perfect moral Rule is not *absolutely impossible*, where the most is made of that Stock,
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which Nature hath bestow'd ; yet still it appears in fact, that *no such Scheme* hath yet been offer'd to the World by the mere strength of natural Reason. No Philosopher hath hitherto pointed out our Duty in *every* Particular : and the best Writings of this sort of Men are intersper'd with *Errors* of a dangerous Nature.

It is true indeed, a tolerably perfect Scheme might *possibly* be collected from the scatter'd Writings of several Authors : But then we may demand, What Person, by the force of mere human Strength, was equal to the Work ? All Men were subject to vast Disadvantages : and the same natural Defects which vitiated the Labours of each *original Writer*, would equally have influenc'd the Labours of a *Collector*.

We will suppose however, (which no Arguments of our Adversaries can oblige us to suppose) that a perfect moral Rule *might* have been discover'd ; and what is more, that such a Rule was *actually* discover'd, by some of the Philosophers. This must, no doubt, be of vast Use to that Person to whom it was *known*. But yet, What Advantage could this be to the rest of the World, who might
still

still remain in the grossest *Ignorance*? We do not find that the generality of Mankind were much *improv'd* by the Studies of the Philosophers. Their Knowledge was chiefly confin'd within their own narrow Schools; and little more of them was known abroad beside their Names. Be it that they drew up just Schemes of Duty; yet to *reform* the World was a more difficult Task: Mankind labour'd under vast Disadvantages as to the *receiving* their Precepts; and such, as they could never hope to surmount, tho' they had set about it with their utmost Care and Zeal.

There are but *Three* Ways of settling a Rule of Duty for the World, without the Benefit of a *Divine Revelation*, viz. Either,

First, By the mere Strength of *Reason* and *Argument*;

Or else, By the *Credit* and *Authority* which the Framers of such a Rule may obtain in the World;

Or, lastly, By the Assistance of *Secular Power*.

But all these are insufficient.

I am to observe therefore, in the *first* place, That the Philosophers could not hope

to prevail much by the mere strength of *Reason* and *Argument*.

To discover a Truth, and to impart it to others, require different Talents : And therefore, we cannot conclude, that those Persons who have happily succeeded in their own private *Enquiries*, shall be equally successful in their publick *Instructions*. Some things may be rightly *understood*, which yet the Person, who understands them, cannot *explain* to others with Advantage : Or, if the Arguments which prevail'd with him, and gain'd his Assent, be represented in their *utmost strength*, yet they lose abundance of their Force on Persons who have been us'd to a *different Way* of thinking. Some are incapable of *discerning* Truth, unless it be plac'd in a *particular* Point of Light. On such Persons Arguments may be lost ; not thro' any Defect in the *Proofs* themselves, but thro' the *Infirmity* of the Hearer. Serious and thinking Men labour under this Misfortune : and from hence may we account for that *Variety* of Sentiments which are sometimes maintain'd concerning the same Points. Reason, I say, doth not prevail, because the Persons, to whom 'tis offer'd, are *incapable* of receiving it. But

But if Difficulties of this Nature would probably arise even amongst those of *better* Rank, and a more *thoughtful* Temper, we may expect to meet with greater Disadvantages amongst the *lower*, and *less improv'd* part of Mankind. It is seen that the *Bulk* and *Generality* of Men (even in the present Times of Science) are incapable of entering far into *deep* and *abstruse* Reasonings. Some labour under *natural* Defects, which no Care or Study can remove. Others are *narrow'd* in the Beginning; confin'd to a *little set* of Notions suggested to them by those Objects which are familiar; and being *unus'd* to employ their Minds in Study and Contemplation, in time they lose their very natural *Vigour*.—Or, if their Parts should not be entirely lost, but something of their natural Stock still remain, yet what mighty Improvements can be expected, where so *considerable* a Share of their Time is taken up in providing themselves with the *Necessaries* of Life?—Or, if it should happen, that Time and Opportunity for better Improvement offer themselves, yet to *Think* and *Reason* is a difficult Task to Persons unaccustom'd to it: It will require *Pains* and *Trouble*: The *Uneasiness*

of *Attention* will discourage any farther Search; and they will content themselves with Ignorance in those Points, in which they are not *bold* enough to hope for *Knowledge*. —Or, if after all, they should prevail with themselves to *attend* carefully to the Instructions of the Philosopher, yet still there are many *Prejudices* to be conquer'd before they can hope to profit by his Instructions. There is no passing any considerable part of Life without *entertaining* some Opinions at least concerning religious and moral Matters. These, once entertain'd, are not easily to be rooted out; and it is remarkable, that the *weaker* the Grounds are, on which they are built, they are apt to be espous'd with the greater *Zeal*, and retain'd with the greater *Obstinacy*. Even in *common* Life we meet with a great deal of this kind: How much more may we expect to meet with in those Points, which Men have been accusom'd to reckon *sacred*?

Add to this, That the more *ignorant* Men are, they are the more unapt to *learn*: being less sensible of their own *Wants*, they are the less open to better *Information*: That *Pride* and *Passion* corrupt their Judgments; and

and at the same time that they *blind* their Minds, and render them incapable of *judging* for themselves, they indispose them to submit to the wiser Judgments of others.

This leads me on to examine the *second* Way in which a Moral Rule may be thought *possible* to be settled, without the Benefit of a *Divine Revelation*; viz. By the *Credit* and *Authority* which the Framers of this Rule have acquired in the World.

I have observ'd already, That the *Generality* of Mankind are incapable of entering far into *deep* and *abstruse* Reasonings, and consequently of receiving a Moral Rule, merely on the Foot of *Reason* and *Argument*. In such Circumstances as these, some Relief however might be obtained, if Men were generally sensible of their own *Ignorance*, and ready to *submit* to those Persons who are capable of directing them. But 'tis obvious to observe, That *Self-Conceit* often bears Proportion to *Ignorance*; and Men are most *positive* in those Points, in which they ought to determine with the greatest *Modesty* and *Caution*. To *submit* to others, is to acknowledge some *Defect* in himself, which an opinionative Person will be backward to own; 'Tis to acknowledge a superior

perior *Skill* in others, which is still a greater Mortification to his *Pride*; and (which is beyond all this, disagreeable) 'Tis to acknowledge a *Superiority* in others, even as to those Points, in which all Men are *equally* concerned.

The *natural Equality* of all Men, is a Notion, which, however true, when *rightly* understood, is liable to be *abus'd* to very unhappy Purposes. It will indeed follow from hence, That no one Person, merely *as a Man*, hath a Right to *govern* or *prescribe* to others; for thus far *all Men* are upon a Level. But yet, as there are different intellectual Capacities and Abilities, so it is in its own Nature fitting, that those who are *incapable* of directing themselves, should *submit* to the Counsel and Direction of others; and there is no one so extravagantly fond of *Liberty*, as to dispute this general Conclusion. But the Misfortune lies here; The *Bulk* of Mankind are not sensible in what Instances they want *Direction*. They will allow perhaps, that in Matters of *Science*, in which they have no Concern, those Persons, whose Studies have lain that Way, may have gain'd a *superior Skill*; In such Cases they will readily *submit*, and not set their own
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crude Conceptions against the Decisions of those Persons they acknowledge *learned*. But we are much mistaken if we expect the same Submission in *Moral* Matters. Here every Man presumes he is capable of *determining* for himself: Every one will claim a Right to judge of his *own* Pleasures or Pains; — the good or bad Consequences of his *own* proper Actions; — the Fitness or Unfitness of *doing* them; and consequently, he will be apt to reject the Authority of the wisest Man upon Earth, in Points of this Nature, unless it be *conformable* to his own private Opinion.

Of this the *Philosophers* have been so sensible, that as often as they have pretended to prescribe a *general Rule*, they have called in the Assistance of some *superior Being*: They have endeavour'd to stamp a *Divine Credit* on their own Institutions, and to interest *God* in confirming those Laws which could not be supported by the mere Authority of *Man*.

Hitherto I have endeavour'd to show, how little Persons of acknowledged Skill and Wisdom could hope to prevail, by the mere *Credit* and *Authority* of their Wisdom. But beyond this, it is farther obvious to observe, that Difficulties will be apt to arise, concerning the

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Degree of Credit which ought to be given to such Teachers of Morality. The *runder* Part of Mankind are not the best Judges of the intellectual Talents and Abilities of others. From hence they will be apt to pay, either too great, or too little a Regard to them; and consequently, though they should be ever so *sincerely* disposed, yet having no sufficient Rule whereby to direct their *Choice* of a Teacher, they will have at least as great a Chance to make a *wrong* Choice, as a *good* one.

And Difficulties of this Kind were so much the greater, when Morality subsisted merely on the Foot of the Doctrines of the Philosophers; because it is well known, that the Philosophers themselves were divided into *numberless Sects*, each teaching *different* Institutions from all the rest, and endeavouring as much as in them lay, to *decry* the Credit and Authority of others. How should a Person, who would be *instructed* in Points of Moral Duty, conduct himself in this Case? — You will say, “ Let him chuse the *best*. — But still the Question will return, “ How shall he “ decide, which is *best* and *fittest* to be chosen? This Point is yet to be *determined*: And unless it can some Way or other be determined,

terminated, it is natural to suppose, that the more *libertine* Sects would gain the greatest Number of Followers ; as best suiting the Schemes they propose to the *corrupt* Appetites and Passions of Men. So, that for any Thing which appears, this Method of settling Morality by the mere *Credit* and *Authority* of the Philosophers, is not only a *vain* Project, but such an one, as (if it be of any *Avail* in this Case) will be apt to *corrupt* the Morality it would settle.

It remains, that we examine, in the *last* Place, How far this Point may be fixed by the Assistance of *Secular Power*.

Here then I desire to observe, That *no* Philosopher, however perfect that Scheme of *Morality* may be, which he hath drawn out for publick Use, hath any Right, either consider'd *as a Man*, or endu'd with *superior* intellectual Talents, to enforce such a Scheme by *civil Sanctions*. For though Superiority of *Knowledge* may found a Right of giving *Advice*, yet this is but *Advice* still. And if Mankind should be disposed to *reject* it, he could only complain of their *Folly* and *Obstinacy*, but not of their *Disobedience*.

The *Civil Powers* in Being have indeed a Right to take the best Care they can of the publick Welfare of their People ; and consequently, to enforce, by *Civil Sanctions*, the Practice of those Things which appear to be conducive to that End. But the Philosopher, *as such*, hath no Right to use Enforcements of this Nature. From whence it follows, that he can be supported only in the present Expedient, by the Concurrence of the *Civil Powers* in Being.

This Consideration will suggest a Difficulty in the Method propos'd ; namely, That since the Philosopher can enforce his Rules only by the Concurrence of the *Civil Power*, it must be left to the *Discretion* of the Civil Power, whether they shall be *enforc'd* at all ; — Whether any general Scheme of Morality shall be *enacted* ; or if some, — Whether the Scheme of some other Philosopher, in *Preference* to his. If this then be the only Way of *settling* Morality, we shall leave it as *uncertain* as we found it ; *varying* in different Countries, and at different Times ; and subject to all the *Caprice* of weak, passionate, and prejudic'd Men,

Mr. *Hobbes* indeed suppos'd, That the Decisions of the Civil Magistrate were to be the *Rule* of Morality, and that the very *Obligations* of Duty could be founded only in his Will. In the present Scheme, the Point is not carry'd so far. The Rule of Duty is suppos'd to have its Foundation in *Reason*; — To have been *discovered* by the Labours of the Philosopher; and to receive its *Enforcement* from the Power of the Magistrate. But what, I say, if the Magistrate himself should be under a *Mistake*? — Should either refuse to establish any Scheme of Virtue at all; — or chuse an *imperfect* one; — or, having once made a right Choice, through Levity of Temper *change* it? Those who are incapable of being influenced to a virtuous Life in any other Way than this, must be left in a very *uncertain* Condition.

But to be as favourable as we can; We will suppose, That the Magistrate is guided only by Reason, and employs his Power in the best Way possible, to enforce a *perfect* Morality. In such a Case as this, some Good may be done no Doubt. But yet it will be found upon Examination, that this cannot reach so far as to enforce the *general* Practice of Virtue.

The Reason is evident ; Because a great Number of Moral Duties are of such a Nature, that they are incapable of being *supported* by Civil Sanctions. *Publick Laws* can respect those Actions only, which do some Way or other respect the *Publick*. In those Instances in which no *other* Persons have any immediate Concern, there will be little Fear of *Civil Censure* ; and consequently, upon this Scheme, such Instances will be entirely unsupported.

Again ; There are others, which are transacted only within a Man's own Mind ; and therefore, how much soever they may affect the Publick, by the remote Consequences which they produce ; they must yet be entirely *exempt* from Civil Power ; and though in this Respect, a Magistrate should pretend to *make* a Law, he could never *execute* it.

Lastly, There are other Duties which are in the very Nature of them *free* from Civil Enforcements ; — So *free*, that as soon as Civil Sanctions are annexed to them, they cease to *exist*. Thus, for Instance, *Gratitude*, *Charity*, *Generosity*, and the like, are, and must be *free* : As soon as they are *enforc'd* they lose their Nature ; and what was before
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Gratitude, Charity, or Generosity, becomes from thenceforth the Discharge of a legal *Debt* : This therefore must be a very unhappy Project, which, in some Instances, must *destroy* that Virtue it should *support*.

Beyond all this, there is another strong Objection against settling Morality merely by the Assistance of *Secular Power*, viz. That Expedients of this kind serve rather to *secure* the Good, than to *reclaim* and *better* the Wicked. They *restrain* them indeed from many outward Acts of Sin ; But they do not *correct* the Heart, or produce in the Mind any sincere *Abhorrence* or *Detestation* of it. They may *enforce* the outward Practice of a virtuous Action ; But so long as a Man hath no secret *Love* or *Approbation* of that Action, and complies with it on no other Score, than because he must otherwise be expos'd to *suffer*, he is as far remov'd from *Virtue* as ever ; he is inwardly a very *Evil* Being, and really *deserves* the Punishments which he avoids.

Upon the whole then ; since a Scheme of Moral Duty cannot be fix'd, so as to become a *general Rule* of Action, either on the foot of *Reason* and *Argument* ;—Or, By the mere
2 *Credit,*

Credit, and *Authority* of the Teacher;—
Or, By the best Assistance which can possibly
be deriv'd from the Concurrence of the *Civil*
Power,—it follows, that Nothing could an-
swer this End, but the Confirmation of a
Divine Authority: And therefore, a Divine
Revelation was highly *expedient* in order to
settle such a Scheme of Duty.

I shall now pass on to the next Point I pro-
pos'd to consider, namely, The farther *Ex-*
pediency of a Revelation, in order to *enforce*
a Scheme of Duty once known, by suitable
Rewards and Punishments.

Under my former Argument, I consider'd
the Application of *Civil Sanctions* to moral
Behaviour, without supposing any *antecedent*
Perswasion concerning Duty or Sin, in those
Persons to whom they are applied. In the
present, I am to consider Sanctions as *subsequent*
to an acknowledg'd Rule of Behaviour:
And shall take the Liberty to affirm, that
Nothing but a *Divine Revelation* can be suf-
ficient in this Case.

We now suppose a Rule of Duty known.
But the mere speculative *Knowledge* of Duty
can only *direct* us what we ought to do, but
not *move* us to the Performance of it. The
Reason

Reason of this is plain: Men are either *thoughtless* and *inconsiderate*, and therefore unapt to *attend*, on particular Emergencies, to the habitual Perswasions of their Minds: — Or else, they are *lazy* and *unactive*; unwilling to take *Pains*, and to exert themselves with *Vigour*: — Or, lastly, (which is worse than all this) they are strongly solicited by *Desires* from within, or *Temptations* from abroad, to swerve from the Rules of Duty. In these Circumstances, it is necessary that some *Motives* be propos'd, which shall affect the Mind in a very lively manner: such, as may fix its *Attention*, quicken its *Industry*, and ballance those *Temptations* which are unhappily laid in our Way.

Now Motives to this purpose are either *Temporal*, or *Spiritual*; are such, as either regard *this* Life, or a *future*. Let us examine what can be done in either of these respects, without the Advantage of a Divine Revelation.

Those Motives which are Temporal, and regard the present Life, must arise either from *Civil Sanctions*: — or, the *natural Consequences* of Mens Actions; — or else, the judicial Interpositions of *Providence*.

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Civil Sanctions cannot be sufficient, for the Reasons assign'd under my former Argument. There are some Instances o' moral Conduct, of such a Nature, that no *Civ* *Enforcements* can possibly be applied to them: Others are transacted with so much Art, that they escape the *publick Notice*: The Severities of Law are frequently *evaded* thro' Interest, or Power: And lastly, Tho' the Civil Administration be order'd with the utmost *strictness*, yet the Cause of Virtue is still unsupported; because the most that Civil Sanctions can do, is, to restrain the more exorbitant *outward Acts* of Sin: But nothing can be done, this way, towards enforcing on the *Consciences* of Men the real Sentiments of Virtue.

The natural good or bad *Consequences* of Mens Actions would indeed be a more serviceable Motive, if Men were always capable of *discerning* these Consequences, and willing to *attend* to them. But we must be utter Strangers to the World, if we think the *Generality* of Men are apt to look so far. They are chiefly affected by sensible Appearances. Their Thoughts are engross'd by *present* Good or Evil, Pleasure or Pain. Future Things are too *distant* and out of Sight;
And

And it requires either more Capacity or Trouble to bring them into View, than most Men are either Masters of, or willing to undertake.

Nor can much more be expected from the presum'd Interposition of *Divine Providence*. We do readily admit indeed, that Men have always had some *general* Notions of an overruling Power. But then, it is as certain, that before a *Revelation*, their Conceptions in this regard were *indistinct*; and consequently, insufficient to support the general Practice of Virtue.

For, in the *first* place, It is no easy matter, even under the present Light which we enjoy, to distinguish nicely between that Providence which is *ordinary* and *common*, and that which is *extraordinary* and *judicial*: Between that which happens according to the *common* Rules of things, and that which is intended as the *Reward* or *Punishment* of our Actions. But, unless this can be done with some tolerable Exactness, the mere Consideration of a *judicial Providence* will come short of the End propos'd.

In the *next* place, we may observe, (what hath been remark'd indeed in all Ages of the World)

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that Good and Evil are *promiscuously* distributed in this Life; That, as the Vicious do often *thrive* and prosper, so the Virtuous are expos'd to *Trials*. Some Instances, it must be own'd, there have been of a *singular* Nature, and such as have plainly discover'd to us the Hand of *Providence*. But, as these are *uncommon*, so the Effects which they ought to have on the Minds of Men by degrees wear off. They are more apt to be influenc'd by *ordinary* Occurrences, than by *singular* Exceptions: *And because Sentence against an evil Work is not executed speedily, therefore the Hearts of the Sons of Men are fully set in them to do evil.*

The Consideration of these things hath induc'd some of the more Wise and Thinking to conclude the *Necessity* of a future State; and the Argument no doubt is good. We do allow and contend farther, that some *Perswasion* of a future State hath *generally* obtain'd: And this, at first Sight, may appear sufficient for the Support of Virtue. But a little further Examination will lay the Mistake open. The Philosophers themselves, who had hit on an Argument so strictly *conclusive*, yet knew not always how to make the *most*

of it. They were apt to express their *Doubts* of the Conclusion; and seem'd rather to *wish* or to *hope*, than to be *certain* of it.

But let us suppose that this Argument had prov'd to Them as *convincing*, as it was in it self *cogent*: Yet still, unless they had been able to bring it down to the Capacities of the Vulgar, it could serve but to little purpose. I have remark'd in the Course of my former Argument, that the *Generality* of Mankind are not apt to enter far into *abstruse* Reasonings. Arguments therefore of this kind must be lost on them: And they had little more to support their Belief of a future State, than a certain *Propension* of Mind to the Belief of it. But was This sufficient to enable them to combat the *Difficulties* of Virtue?—To oppose inward *Desires*; —To break thro' inveterate *Habits*; —To resist pressing *Temptations*; —And to persevere in this Struggle thro' a *whole Course* of Life? Its *Insufficiency* for this End is plain from hence, That it could not support, in any tolerable Degree, the Practice of those Duties which they *own'd*. Their *Passions* were too strong for the *Reason* which they enjoy'd, and

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the *Expectations* which they acknowledg'd,

A State of future Rewards and Punishments is indeed the *proper Sanction* of the Laws of Virtue. But no Sanctions can be of any Force any farther than they are *believ'd* and *attended* to ; And in proportion to the *Difficulties* to be contended with, so the Belief of these Sanctions should be more *lively and vigorous*. We do not therefore deny, That there were, in former Times, any *sufficient Reasons* for the Belief of a future State ;— There were, no Doubt : But this we maintain, that these Reasons were not *credited* in proportion to the real Weight of them. Nor do we deny, That there was any *general Perswasion* of a future State ; — This also we contend for ; But we maintain however, That this Perswasion was, for the most part, *indistinct* and *weak* ; and consequently, incapable of supporting that great Burthen which must rest upon it.

From all which we infer, That as the Cause of Virtue must be in a Manner *destitute*, unless God should be pleas'd to interpose, so such an Interposition was highly *expedient* ; in the Nature of Things *proper* ; suitable to the *Divine Attributes* ; and what we might reasonably

bly *hope* from a Being, whose Regard to Virtue is *unalterable*, and whose Love to Man is *boundless*.

I must intreat your Patience, whilst I draw two Conclusions from what hath been advanced.

The *First* regards those Persons, who entirely *reject* a Divine Revelation. And,

The *Second* concerns those, who *admit* and *embrace* the Christian.

With Reference to the former, I have just noted already, That as an extraordinary *Manifestation* of the Divine Will, was, in this corrupt State of human Nature, highly *expedient*, so it was reasonable to *hope* at least, that God would some Time or other make such a Manifestation. From hence an Argument hath been drawn in favour of our Religion. It is alledg'd, That no other Scheme, except the *Jewish*, can make the least plausible Pretences to a *Divine Authority*: And the *Jewish* is not so much to be consider'd under the Notion of a *distinct* Religion, as of being the *first* Link in the Chain of Providence, and a *Foretaste* of better Things intended under the Gospel. If therefore some Divine Manifestation

festation were *expedient* to be made ; — If we might reasonably *hope* that God would make some such Manifestation ; — If the *Christian* Religion be entirely *worthy* of God, and such an one as we might *expect* from him, if he should ever *reveal* himself at all ; — And, lastly, If there be no other Scheme of Religion which hath a *better*, or near so *good* a Claim to be received ; we may then conclude, That this Religion did really proceed from God.

But whether our Adversaries will admit this Conclusion or no, yet thus much we may confidently insist on, That since it is *expedient* that some Revelation should be made, whatever Scheme pretends to recommend it self on the foot of a *Divine Authority*, hath a Right to be fairly *try'd* : For to reject, without any Examination at all, can be allowed only in those Cases, in which the Point that demands a Trial is *manifestly absurd*. We do insist on it therefore, as a direct Consequence from the *Expediency* of a Divine Revelation in the general, That the *Christian* Scheme should be fairly *try'd*. Let our Adversaries examine Whether there be any *sufficient Objection*, against the *Doctrines* which it proposes, or the *Duties* which it enjoins ; and, Whether the

external Proof which we offer from the *Prophecies* accomplish'd, and the *Miracles* wrought, will bear the Weight laid on them. If this be once done in earnest, the Event will be certain. Pretended *Contradictions* will vanish; presumed *Difficulties* will clear up; and the *Christian* Religion will evidently appear to be, what the Apostle terms it, *The Wisdom of God, and the Power of God.*

I will just apply my self to another Sort of Persons, *viz.* Those who *admit* and *embrace* Christianity.

If what hath been already advanced be true, That the Infirmities of human Nature are such, that the Cause of *Virtue* cannot be supported but on the foot of *Revelation*; — If it were impossible to fix a *moral* Rule for *general* Use, or to *enforce* such a Rule by sufficient *Motives*, without a *Divine Authority*, Then it becomes us to adore the *Goodness* of God, who hath made such ample Provision for the *Necessities* of Man. The extream *Occasion* which we had for a Revelation, should *endear* the Revelation made to us: should teach us to value it as a *Treasure*; to defend it as a *Trust*; to study it as a *Collection* of the most *useful*

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Knowledge; and, to conform to it as the *supreme Rule* of Action: In a Word, to treat it in every Respect as the best Ground of our *Comfort* in this Life, and our *Expectations* in the next.

F I N I S.

Published by the same Author.

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